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De-sportizing physical activity: From sport-for-development to play-for-development

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Although many initiatives use sport as a tool to blur boundaries and foster social mixing, the way physical activity is organized and displayed for such purposes suggests critical reflections about the potential of sport in terms of social inclusivity. When used for social purposes, mainstream sports often need to be adapted and partially de-structured by downplaying their competitive dimension, blurring categorizations through mixed-gender, mixed-age, mixed-ethnic, or mixed-ability teams, and reducing the distinction between players and spectators. Therefore, while the process of sportisation has re-shaped old forms of play and games, re-framing them as sports, when it comes to use physical activity to foster sociability the tendency seems to be the other way around, meaning that sports are re-shaped (or de-shaped) into mere games and even less structured forms of play. Drawing on both fieldwork carried out by the author and the main literature in the field, the paper provides a theoretical and analytical exploration of such a de-sportising trend.

Keywords: sport-for-development, de-sportization, inclusion, games, play

Introduction

The increasing use of sport as a tool to address a variety of social issues at both the international and local level is often underpinned by rhetorically enthusiastic statements about its inner qualities (Beutler, 2008; Kidd, 2008). However, concerns and criticisms have been raised about the actual contribution of sport to inclusive social change (Kelly, 2011; Long & Sanderson, 2001), the vagueness and ambiguity of many sport-for-development initiatives and claims (Black, 2010; Coalter, 2010) and their potential neo-

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colonial impact (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011). In providing critical analysis with both theoretical and practical significance (Donnelly, Atkinson, Boyle & Szto, 2011; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011), academic researchers have warned that it is not the inner characteristics of sport per se which automatically builds bridges between people, overcome boundaries and foster inclusive interaction. Accordingly, the analysis of transformative/inclusive sports events and programmes tends to overlook what people do within these initiatives (the type and form of physical activities) and focus more on how (values, principles, relational and pedagogical style), where (social, political, cultural and economic context) and when (pre-, during- and post- interventions, sustainability) these initiatives are carried out.

Rightly prioritising these fundamental dimensions, the scientific literature devotes limited space to the description and analysis of the actual physical activities that are practised within alternative/inclusive sports initiatives. Whilst this aspect has been partly explored from an events management perspective (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011; Schulenkorf & Edwards, 2012), a socio-cultural analysis of physical activities in alternative/inclusive sports is still lacking and could provide important insights into the current evolutions of bodily cultures.

Notably, such a perspective enables us to notice that sports often need to be adapted and de-structured in order to actually blur boundaries and favour social mixing. What does this tell us about the limits of sport (as a specific configuration and cultural form of bodily practice and social relations) in breaking down boundaries and addressing social issues? When describing alternative/inclusive physical activities can we still call them "sports" or are they something else? If the latter is the case, why do we keep labelling them sport-for-development activities? What does this tell us about the symbolic and communicative power of the word sport?

This paper addresses such questions by suggesting that alternative/inclusive sports initiatives tend to operate a "de-sportisation" of physical activities in order to make them more similar to informal play and games. By providing an exploratory analysis of this trend, the article contributes to an extension of the theoretical reflection on de-sportisation (Malcolm, 2005; Stokvis, 1992), so far primarily concerned with the de-regulation of violence (van Bottenburg & Heilbron, 2011).

After summarising why and how the sportisation process has generated social boundaries and categorisations, the paper will analyse different but interrelated de-sportising dynamics that characterise numerous alternative/inclusive sports initiatives,

and notably: the creation of mixed teams (across the usual sports categories), the downplaying of competitiveness, the multifocality of "sport plus" initiatives and the overlapping between players and spectators.

Sportisation, separation, classification

Sport is a contested concept which is used with different meanings to indicate a variety of physical activities (Eichberg, 2010). Notwithstanding this polysemy, and despite the pluriformity and complexity of the development and diffusion of modern sports (van Bottenburg, 2010), this concept is nowadays mainly used with reference to performance-oriented competitive physical activity. Far from being the only meaning for the word *sport* (Eichberg, 2008), this acceptation has nonetheless become mainstream, especially in those Western cultures where most sport-for-development initiatives and programmes are conceived and funded. Therefore, this conception of sport will constitute the reference point for this paper.

As has been explained in different ways (Eichberg, 1978; Elias & Dunning, 1986; Guttmann, 2004), competitive physical play has been organised and shaped into a radically new form in our modern societies. The quantification of results and the standardisation of the conditions under which they are achieved has made it possible to extend physical competition beyond the here and now by comparing performances carried out in different times and places. This affects both the way results are achieved in modern sports – i.e. through highly rationalised forms of training and specialisation – and, to an even greater extent, the way they are measured, sanctioned and recorded.

As a consequence, sports generate several levels of social separation besides the evident opposition between (individual or collective) competitors. In fact, the need for objective quantification and comparison leads to at least two relevant forms of separation and categorisation, in the paradoxical requirement both to ensure initial equality among the participants on the one hand, and to celebrate the final inequality that is produced by ranking their different achievements on the other. At the former level of categorisation, modern sports need to separate participants according to gender, age, physical ability, sporting skills and often nationality as a necessary premise to make the competition balanced and fair and the result unpredictable. On the second level, people are classified into rankings and new categories as a result of their sporting performance.

Unlike informal play and games, where the consequences for winners and losers are more ephemeral, modern sports intrinsically generate a pressure to perform that tends to eclipse their playful dimension. Athletic achievements are crystallised by sports governing bodies into statistics, tables, promotion and relegation, which makes each sport performance highly consequential (Collins, 2004; Goffman, 1967) in terms of social recognition and reputation and also, for many, economic success.

This nourishes the winning at all costs culture that characterises power/performance sports as opposed to pleasure/participation physical practices (Coakley, 2007). Such a culture emphasises the opposition between competitors and highlights the distinction between skilled/successful and unskilled/unsuccessful participants, sometimes marginalising the worst performers or encouraging their self-exclusion through burn-out (Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2008; Siegenthaler & Leticia Gonzalez, 1997).

Although these characteristics primarily apply to elite sports, they have been increasingly mirrored and reproduced in recreational and grassroots sports as well. Hence, despite all the rhetoric about sport as a medium that brings people together, it is quite evident that many of its formal and structural features tend to produce boundaries and separations rather than enable social mixing. As noted by Elling, Knoppers and De Knop (2001, 416), "there are no formal sport events, for example, in which a 14-year-old girl in a wheelchair would have to compete with or against a physically able 18-year-old boy and a 50-year-old woman." In other words, sports rules and institutions create external and internal boundaries by clearly defining who can play and who cannot, and who can play with or against whom (thus generating both exclusion from and exclusion within sport).

Notwithstanding all this evidence, as noted before, sport is increasingly used as a tool for social policies and development programmes aimed at overcoming social boundaries (Spaaij, 2011). Although the potential of informal lifestyle sports has been recently considered for such a purpose (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011; Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013), because of their anti-competitive ethos and aversion to institutionalisation and regulation[2], most of the programmes or events that use sport to foster sociability and

[2] Nonetheless, these emerging activities tend to be quite quickly "sportised" and institutionalised through the introduction of (often commodified and sponsored) contests, on the one hand, and the standardization and normalisation of the practice through disciplining rules and sanitized spaces (as with the provision of skate parks, or the requirement of formally acknowledged teaching licences for parkour instructors), on the other.

overcome social boundaries are still based on mainstream sports, notably competitive team sports and particularly football. Within these programmes and events, however, the form and structure of mainstream competitive sports are often manipulated in different ways to make them more suitable for reaching the aforementioned goals. As noted by Rookwood and Palmer (2011, 193):

> There are clearly some alternative activities which could serve more readily towards meeting these humanitarian aspirations of the NGO. However, it may be worth considering first whether the NGO that promotes football is actually doing football at all. If they are not actually doing football, it may be worth asking what they are doing. For example, if I am kicking a tennis ball against a wall and sharing kicks with a person I hope to become friendly with, am I playing football, tennis or squash or something else? My gut feeling is that I am playing "something else".

From a theoretical and analytical perspective, it can be argued that many alternative/inclusive sports events and programmes tend to de-sportise physical activity. Nevertheless, this aspect seems to be rather overlooked in the literature of sport-for-development and by the sociology of sport more generally, with the concept of de-sportisation being surprisingly under-utilised. The two main dimensions of sportisation, intended as the civilisation and modernisation of games and recreational physical activity, can be summarised as the (Eliasian) regulation of violence and the (Weberian) iron-cage effect of rationalised formalisation and standardisation (Malcolm, 2005; Stokvis, 1992). So far, the concept of de-sportisation has been mainly used to analyse the de-regulation of violence, with mixed martial arts and other combat sports becoming a fertile field for analysis and debate (Sanchez Garcia & Malcolm, 2010; van Bottenburg & Heilbron, 2006, 2011). Less frequently was de-sportisation intended as the (deliberate) loosening of rationalised and boundary-making sports forms in favour of more playful and inclusive configurations (Green, 1997). Although the persistence of traditional games (Eichberg, 2008) and the development of lifestyle sports (Wheaton, 2004) are studied as forms of resistance to the sportisation process, the deliberate creation of less sportised practices such as tchouckball, touch rugby, korfball and others (Costantinou, 2010; Crum, 1988; van Bottenburg & Vermeulen, 2011) still receives

limited attention and the concept of de-sportisation is rarely utilised even in that case[3]. Investigating the de-sportising tendency in the sport-for-development field could therefore offer an interesting opportunity to further develop and articulate the concept.

After providing a methodological overview, the following sections will explore the phenomenology of such a re-shaping trend by drawing on case studies from both the existing literature and previous fieldwork carried out by the author.

Exploring de-sportization: Towards an analytical framework

This paper represents a first step towards the extension and possible generalisation of analytical categories which emerged from previous case studies carried out by the author in different contexts. That material is therefore integrated with further examples from the existing literature to outline an analytical framework for the interpretation of the forms of physical activity within sport-for-development initiatives.

The main empirical work underpinning this paper is a longitudinal study of the intercultural multisport festival called *Mondiali Antirazzisti* (Antiracist World Cup), investigated by the author through ethnographic observation, qualitative interviews and analysis of secondary data from 2006 to 2013 (for methodological details see Sterchele & Saint-Blancat, 2013). This research showed the relevance of four analytical topics – mixed teams, downplay competition, multifocality and players/spectators overlapping – to explore the de-sportisation of physical activity in alternative/inclusive sport events. Whilst multifocality is a partly innovative concept that combines and develops different theories on social rituals, none of the other topics is particularly new to the sociology of sport. However, it is their combination into an integrated framework for the analysis of de-sportisation in sport-for-development (and potentially beyond) that represents the innovative character of this paper. In this sense, despite drawing on the author's previous case studies and on the existing literature, the paper can be still considered exploratory since it is a first attempt to extend this analytical framework to a broader and so far overlooked area of investigation.

Although the framework emerged from the study of the Mondiali Antirazzisti, here used as a paradigmatic case, its roots were put down on a previous piece of ethnographic research on the Open Fun Football Schools project that uses sport to

[3] Mainstream practices are also manipulated and adapted in disability sport. In this case, however, the aim is to enable athletes with a disability to experience mainstream performance/competitive sports, rather than de-sportise the practice to highlight its playful dimension.

bridge divided communities in Bosnia Herzegovina (Gasser & Levinsen, 2004). This case was part of the author's PhD-research on football and interethnic relations in post-war Bosnia Herzegovina, carried out between 2002 and 2006 (Sterchele, 2008) and complemented by a subsequent follow-up study in 2010-2011 (Sterchele, 2013). Being hosted for several months by a Bosniak family and broadly sharing the ordinary people's everyday life, the author also trained with the local football team and attended several Open Fun Football Schools' seminars and activities, where qualitative fieldwork was undertaken. Another multiethnic football festival often mentioned in this paper is the *Balon Mundial*, that was initially part of the broader research on alternative sport events which included the Mondiali Antirazzisti. In this case, the paper draws only on unpublished preliminary observation and interviews, together with secondary information from the event's website.

The remaining examples used in this article mainly come from the literature on sport-for-development. Looking for detailed descriptions of the specific activities carried out during alternative/inclusive sport-based initiatives, the review was carried out through snowball searching by following up on both cited and citing references from those academic articles initially known by the author for devoting some space to such descriptions. Clearly not claiming to be systematic, rather this review aimed at providing further cases to test the analytical categories. A more meticulous test of the theory will also need a broader examination of the data available online from the numerous NGOs and institutions operating within the sport-for-development sector, whilst this search was only carried out through a purposive approach for this paper.

Keyword searching supplemented with snowball searching was also carried out on the concept of de-sportisation, initially using the search engines of the main sociology of sport journals. The enquiry was subsequently extended to the search engines of their respective publishing companies, as well as to Google Scholar and Google Books. Different versions of the word were entered, such as for instance de-sportising, de-sportise, de-sport, de-sportification, etc., in both full and hyphenated versions (using truncation and wild card symbols) as well as UK and US English versions. As noted earlier in this paper, the results highlighted an under-utilisation of the concept and therefore a potential for its articulation. The following sections seek to contribute to this development by observing how sport practices are manipulated and adapted within a number of sport-for-development initiatives. The next paragraphs will provide several

examples to illustrate the four analytical categories whilst for the sake of convenience the critical remarks will be concentrated in the final discussion.

Breaking down boundaries: Back to play and games?

Mixed teams

A first (and quite obvious) way of de-categorising sport participants in order to break down boundaries is the creation of mixed teams by merging people who would not otherwise play together.

Ethnic and national mixing is often promoted by events and programmes aiming to prevent conflicts or foster reconciliation in divided societies. For instance, the Open Fun Football Schools project has operated in Bosnia Herzegovina since 1998 bringing together coaches and children from Serb, Croat and Bosniak communities torn apart by the bloody war. Each of the five-day programmes organised in dozens of municipalities every summer is run by an ethnically-mixed team of 12 coaches, four from each of the three municipalities and football clubs involved. Participants are divided into 12 mixed groups of 15 children each, which rotate through various stations where different coaches lead different activities (Cross Culture Project Association, 2003). By the end of the day, each participant has the opportunity to play and interact with all the coaches. Similarly, the Football4Peace initiative organises ethnically-mixed groups to foster interaction between Arabs and Jews in Israel and Palestine (Sugden, 2006), as did the International Sport Meeting in Sri Lanka, by mixing Tamil and Sinhalese (Schulenkorf, 2010).

Beyond post-war contexts, the promotion of ethnically- and nationally-mixed teams is used elsewhere to encourage intercultural communication between different groups, notably to foster inclusion, equality and celebration of ethnic minorities. This happens for instance at the Mondiali Antirazzisti, an intercultural multisport festival organised every summer in Italy since 1998 to bring together football fans, migrant groups, anti-racist and human-rights activists, as well as informal groups of people simply attracted by the playful atmosphere of the event (Sterchele & Saint-Blancat, 2013). Similar versions of anti-racist tournaments, although smaller in scale, have been set up by like-minded associations throughout Europe, such as for instance the AntiRa tournament of St. Pauli fans in Hamburg (Davidson, 2014; Totten, 2011; 2014) or the

annual Community Day organised by Football Unites, Racism Divides (FURD) in Sheffield (Johnson, 2009).

Other events use a different strategy to celebrate minorities which, rather than downplaying their ethnic or national belonging, highlights it. For instance, the Balon Mundial held every summer in Turin, Italy, and the Amsterdam World Cup in the Netherlands (Burdsey, 2008) are football tournaments that similarly feature teams representing the different national communities living in the city. Through competitions where Afghanistan, El Salvador or Moldova compete for success instead of Germany, England or Spain, these initiatives clearly aim at creating a structural reversal (Turner, 1967) by giving visibility and glory to those groups who are usually excluded or under-represented in mainstream sports events.

However, these initiatives tend to reproduce the very same configuration of the mainstream achievement sports, gradually eliminating the unsuccessful teams and eventually celebrating the winning ones. The importance of performance and results in the quest for visibility and recognition generates exclusive features such as the prevalence of highly selective all-male teams, the marginalisation of women as simple supporters or food and refreshment providers (Burdsey, 2008) and the commercialisation, mediatisation and spectacularisation of the event, with hundreds or even thousands of spectators-consumers and just a few participants in the actual sports activities (although the Balon Mundial has progressively evolved in order to address most of these downsides, for instance by creating a woman's tournament and increasing the multifocality of the event).

By contrast, other events try to challenge male dominance and sexist stereotypes by favouring gender-mixed sports interaction. Enhancing female participation was one of the main achievements of the Open Fun Football Schools in Bosnia Herzegovina, where the proportion of girls involved in gender-mixed activities increased from the initial 8% in 1998 to 33% in 2009 (Cross Cultures Project Association, n.d.). Moreover, the presence of female coaches alongside (or even leading) their male colleagues played an important role in questioning the patriarchal sports culture in the Balkans and in other places where the programme was implemented. Gender-mixed activities have also proved to be a powerful tool in unveiling sexist attitudes and stereotypes even within allegedly progressive/anti-discriminatory networks and their alternative sports events. At the Mondiali Antirazzisti, for instance, the presence of all-male, all-female and gender-mixed teams playing each other within the very same tournament generates

some tension between result-oriented and participation-oriented participants, providing opportunities for reflexivity (especially for male participants) regarding their gender stereotypes and their bodily experience during sports activity (Grezzani, 2013; Sterchele & Saint-Blancat, 2013).

Similar tensions and reflections about the role of strength and competitive engagement are further stimulated when participants are also mixed (i.e. not categorised) by age or physical or mental ability. A few children's teams usually take part in the Mondiali Antirazzisti alongside children-adults mixed teams and all-adult teams, with some elderly people playing as well (Sterchele & Saint-Blancat, 2013). Other teams are composed of people with learning disabilities accompanied by social workers and volunteers. Hence, whilst some alternative sports events mainly challenge a specific kind of categorisation, others generate an "intersectional" (or multidimensional) mixing, with teams composed of people of different nationalities, ages, gender and abilities.

Different contexts enable or suggest different ways of managing such a mixing. A careful supervision of this process can be required in divided societies with on-going conflicts, as exemplified by the following account from the Football 4 Peace project:

> As might be expected, on the first day of the project, as the children arrived in buses and cars at each project site, they gathered in separate Jewish and Arab groups, usually sitting quite far apart from one another. One of the first tasks of the coaches was to break them up into four coaching groups, mixed both in terms of community identity and football ability. In this way not only could contact across a sectarian divide be facilitated, but also, as teams emerged during the week in preparation for the finals day, no one team would dominate through an imbalance of skill. (Sugden, 2006, 232)

More random forms of social mixing can be ventured, on the other hand, when the risk of conflict is much lower or highly unlikely. This was well exemplified by the St. Pauli AntiRa tournament in 2013, when the participants arrived in groups from different countries and then merged into mixed teams created by a draw at the beginning of the event (male participant, personal communication). However, besides being influenced by the flammability of the specific contexts, these differences between various events

also depend on the importance that competition acquires as a result of the ways sports activities are organised, ruled and managed.

Downplay competition

Mixing players with different levels of physical and technical ability partly overturns the formal basis of institutionalised sports, leading to unbalanced competition and making victories less significant than the very process of playing and participating. However, far from reducing the relevance as an automatic consequence of the unbalanced mix of participants, the relevance of competition and results also needs to be actively downplayed by those who run the event, as exemplified by the following description from the International Sport Meeting held in Sri Lanka:

> From 10 am to 6.30 pm about 150 children took part in intercultural sport activities such as football, creative sports, and swimming; for the adult community members the day was supplemented with the educational workshop "Social Impacts of Sport Events". In all activities ethnically mixed groups were created and competition was played down to preserve the fun and enjoyment aspects of the games. (Schulenkorf, 2010, 281)

Despite this being a common feature of many alternative (inclusive) sports events, the actual ways competition is downplayed tend to be overlooked by most of the literature, and thus the theoretical insights potentially provided by their observation are missed. For example, the Open Fun Football Schools do not feature a series of typical matches between groups of participants but rather a mix of activities based on the enjoyment of single technical football moves together with other fun games which have no relation to football at all:

> Fun is at the heart of a pedagogical method that has been developed in close detail. Competition is played down to preserve the joyful, playful aspects of the game. There is no physical or tactical training, but rather a focus on techniques children can refine after leaving the school: the unusual strike on the ball, the delicate pass, or the elegant dribble. Exercises are not limited to football skills, but also include other play sports such as rope games, balancing games, communication games, and floor hockey.

> The coaches are trained and the activities designed to make participants feel that they succeed many times during each game or practice; the schools are set up to nurture community spirit and social relations fuelled by the positive energy generated by this sense of success.... The goal is to encourage children to dare to use their imagination and play freely, reassure them that mistakes are permissible, and teach them to take responsibility and to make a positive contribution. (Gasser & Levinsen, 2004, 462)

The STAR Project operates a similar de-sportisation whilst assisting the social reintegration of former child soldiers in Liberia:

> Modern football is characterized by largely consistently applied regulations.... However, within the STAR Project, football was applied outside this regulatory system at times. For example, relays were used incorporating handling the ball and in competitive soccer games where possession was maintained by throw and catch rather than passing with feet. Other apparatus was sometimes utilized which are not permitted in football such as hockey sticks and hoops. Instances in which this innovative method is used served to produce some of the more notable "teachable moments" in which players seemed to learn a great deal. Similarly, regulatory barriers were consciously overlooked in certain instances to facilitate teachable moments. It is clear, therefore, that whilst officially recognized football regulations should be applied in the majority of sessions, there are occasions in which implementing drills and games where these rules are not applied can prove useful. (Rookwood & Palmer, 2011, 190)

Beyond the pedagogical value highlighted by Rookwood and Palmer, de-structured sports practices enable participants to experience bodily movements and technical moves as a pleasure per se rather than instrumentally oriented to the achievement of whatever goal, which makes these activities more similar to informal play rather than games or sports. Moreover, even when competition is involved, results are never crystallised into long-lasting rankings. Defeats or failures can thus be quickly replaced by new opportunities for success, like in fluid informal games rather than rigid institutionalised sports.

However, a variety of strategies to downplay or control competition can be detected also in other events initially born as standard sports tournaments and then

gradually transformed into something different. These strategies can include specific regulations to encourage and reward fair play. At the Balon Mundial for example, disciplinary sanctions rather than goal difference are considered as criteria to decide which team will move to the next round in the case of them having the same ranking. A stronger enforcement of non-competitive rules and a broader range of adaptations characterise the seven-a-side football tournament at the Mondiali Antirazzisti, where studs are banned and players are only allowed to wear trainers or five-a-side football boots. Similarly to other alternative sport events (Gannett, Kaufman, Clark & McGarvey, 2014), all the matches are self-refereed by the players as a means to enhance their ownership and sense of responsibility for preserving non-competitiveness and fair play (Long, Pantaleon & Bruant, 2008), as evidenced by the official rules:

> The Antiracist World Cup is a non-competitive tournament, so there will be no rescheduled matches. Remember: there is no referee. Teams shall self-manage their games, and our "pitch official" shall only keep track of time and score. He/she will step in only in case of excessively rough play and for racist or sexist attitudes.… The first bad foul by a team, regardless of whether this occurs in the penalty area or not, will result in a penalty being awarded to the opposing team. The second bad foul by a team will result in the match being awarded to the opposing team (0-2). If any team forfeits two matches as a result of unsporting behaviour, then that team will be expelled from the tournament. (Mondiali Antirazzisti, n.d.)

When this proved not to be enough, especially during the knock-out phase of the tournament with games getting more intense and teams more concerned with the final victory, a new expedient was introduced: from the quarter-finals onwards, penalty shootouts are now held instead of playing a regular match. This highlights the role of luck over sports-specific skills, turning the sports battle into a lottery game and reminding players that this is just a game. The setting is further de-sportised by allowing all the participants-spectators to go onto the pitch, surrounding the goal and the players who are taking the penalties (Sterchele & Saint-Blancat, 2013). Such a scenario is clearly incompatible with an institutionalised sporting setting, where the physical distance between players and spectators contributes to glorify the former as "masters of ceremonies" by making the pitch a sacred space (La Mendola, 2007). By contrast, the shootout scene at the Mondiali Antirazzisti is closer to a children's playground where

role distinctions are much more blurred and the glory obtained from specific achievements tends to be more ephemeral.

Several other adaptations and manipulations of the game can be found in various football tournaments organised within anarchist sports networks. As listed by Kuhn (2011, 226-227), these can include "open-ended pick-up games with people joining and leaving and no one keeping score; mixing-up sides each time someone scores; and having teams rotate: a team that concedes a goal makes space for another team". Nonetheless, downplayed competition can also generate several downsides. As already mentioned in the previous section, for instance, tensions arise at the Mondiali Antirazzisti between result-oriented and participation-oriented participants due to different interpretations about the level of competitiveness which is deemed appropriate for the tournament. Moreover, as further articulated in the final paragraph, when competition is excessively downplayed participants can lose motivation and the event can lose its appeal (Green, 1997).

Multifocality

Mainstream sports competitions can be considered as social rituals where collective attention and emotions are conveyed towards the athletes and the final result, which thus become sacred objects to those who take part in the ritual itself (Durkheim, 1912). Whilst bonding athletes and spectators as part of the same group celebrating common objects of mental and emotional entrainment, this powerful social mechanism generates unequal recognition, balanced in favour of those who are the centre of attention and absorb a higher amount of collective energy (Collins, 2004). However, this also constitutes a burden for them, since it also generates pressure to perform and achieve (and misrecognition in the case of failure).

In order to weaken this mechanism, alternative sports events tend to multiply the sources of collective effervescence by arranging a mix of different sports and games, often placing them within a wider range of leisure and cultural activities. The event thus turns into a multifocal interaction ritual (Sterchele & Saint-Blancat, 2013) where every participant is provided with several opportunities to become a protagonist in the event, rather than made to fight with others for a single exclusive award.

The pluralisation of foci of attention has a spatial dimension that becomes visible in the organisation of the venues where physical activities take place. In the Open Fun Football Schools the big football pitch is split into 12 small stations where different

games are played simultaneously, thus forming an "arena" which is "deliberately designed to create the feel of festivity and foster a sense of the magic of the game" (Gasser & Levinsen, 2004, 462). As the organisers explain on their handbook for trainers:

> We all love to give a small "festival atmosphere" to our Open Fun Football Schools. (In that sense it is important to emphasize that we care about the atmosphere of the children and not of the spectators). Even if that sounds impossible, the experience we have gained so far tells us that the mood and the atmosphere in a football school is the best when the activities are "packed" in a way that all 12 groups are organized on a playground at the same time.… Besides that, our experience has told us that the sport mood is epidemic. In other words, if one team is getting a good score, its enthusiasm is spreading onto the other group members on the playfield. If we play music at the same time, we are getting incredibly joyful enthusiasm with 200 kids wearing the same T-shirts, working with 200 balls, cones, hula-hop rings and lot more during the same game, and at the same time. If we spread the activities to a bigger space, the joy and mood does not have the same intensity. (Cross Cultures Project Association, 2003, 9)

The plurality of activities going on simultaneously, the mutual entrainment of joyful moods, and the mixture of laughter and music (Eichberg, 2009) jointly help create a "time out of time" (Falassi, 1987) whose festive atmosphere enables liminal encounters between different people (Sterchele & Saint-Blancat, 2013; Turner, 1967). Music plays an even greater role in events such as the St. Pauli AntiRa or the Mondiali Antirazzisti, where DJs constantly play during the matches and several concerts are performed every evening after the games. Additionally, participants take part in a variety of workshops, round-tables, cultural and political discussions, as well as social gatherings in the different bars and restaurants set up for the event. A similar festival-like atmosphere is shared by many alternative/inclusive sports events, such as the annual Community Day organised by FURD in Sheffield:

> Thousands of people from all across the region's diverse communities turn up for a family day out to celebrate their love of football. Hundreds of young people from local schools and youth groups revel in the chance to play in a

> series of football tournaments held on the famous Bramall Lane pitch, watched by the crowds of onlookers on the sidelines and in the stands. Those children not involved in the tournaments have the chance to play Streetkick. Youngsters can enjoy themselves on the bouncy castle and inflatable slide and other entertainment often includes a clown, cheerleaders, DJs, rap crews and dancing displays and boxing exhibitions. Local community groups set up stalls and exhibitions and some specially chosen food stalls provide a taste of something different. The henna painting, hair braiding, beauty therapy, face painting, nail art and the Indian head massage are all extremely popular. The greatest success of the Community Day is the sheer diversity of the people attending. Attendees of the Community Day feature unusually high proportions of female and ethnic minority groups. (Johnson, 2009, 126-127)

As noted by Chalip (2006), these elements further contribute to creating liminal spaces for intercultural dialogue where diversity can be expressed and valued. However, being originally underpinned by a sports management approach Chalip's analysis mainly refers to mainstream events where the athletic competition remains the centre of attention, with the other activities being ancillary and often functional to enhance the appeal (and ultimately support the commercialisation) of the sports competition itself. The plurality of activities in alternative sports events, by contrast, is generally aimed at downplaying the significance of athletic performances by diversifying the criteria for recognition within the event. Moreover, a greater multifocality enhances the otherwise limited reach of sport-for-development initiatives by attracting and leveraging a more diverse audience, thus increasing the inclusivity of the event.

Besides the proliferation of musical and cultural activities, the multiplication of sports activities themselves was used by the organisers of the Mondiali Antirazzisti to further counterbalance the importance of the football tournament, which initially constituted the only sport within the event. Other tournaments were gradually introduced – such as volleyball, basketball, cricket (symbolically inclusive as representative of South-Asian minorities in Italy), rugby (for its fair play ethos), more recently tchoukball and touch rugby (for their gender-neutral ethos) – attracting increasing numbers of players and partly distracting participants from the main football tournament. A further device that enables the organisers to limit the emphasis on the football tournament can be noted in the prize-giving sequence during the final ceremony, where awards such as the Fair Play Cup, the Friendship Cup and the Kick

Sexism Cup are more important than the cup for winning the football tournament. To highlight this hierarchy, the latter is awarded halfway through the ceremony, whilst the Anti-racist Cup – for the team who best upheld the spirit and the ideals of the tournament during the entire year, challenging discrimination in its local context – is awarded as the very last (and therefore most important) trophy (Sterchele & Saint-Blancat, 2013).

The difference between multifocal and mono-focal configurations is evident at the Balon Mundial – a sizeable multicultural football tournament featuring around 40 teams, 1,100 players and 6,000 visitors (Balon Mundial, n.d.) – where the preliminary rounds and the final knock-out stage take place in two different venues. The former are played on two adjacent pitches demarcated by chain-link fences and separated by a 10-metre narrow space. Ethnic food stalls and DJ stands are placed in between, where the multi-ethnic supporters (mainly families and friends) of the players congregate, enjoying the inviting smells and good music whilst casually watching one of the two matches being played simultaneously. By multiplying the foci of attention, such a festive atmosphere helps ease the pressure around the pitch – despite the tensions arising on the pitch between teams intensely competing in a standard football tournament – to a point where a match can be suspended, with players and referee having a big scuffle and leaving the field, without most of the spectators even noticing it (author's ethnographic note, 24th June 2012). This is clearly less likely to happen in the knock-out stages, since from the round-of-sixteen onwards the tournament moves to a regular stadium, with a single pitch surrounded by an athletics track and the spectators restricted to all-seated stands watching the game from a distance. As in mainstream sports events, here attention and emotions are strongly focused on the competition and the final result. Also, the teams (and related communities) already eliminated from the tournament are usually not keen to attend the final stages, which requires the organisers to set up a range of collateral events to keep these teams and related communities involved and counterbalance the importance of the football tournament itself.

Despite their inclusive potential, multifocal configurations can also generate negative impacts. The unbalanced (logistic and symbolic) management of the different foci of attention can disperse collective energy rather than nourish it. Moreover, a plurality of activities and venues within a complex schedule can lead participants to focus on their own isolated and self-referential micro-cosmos. Hence, multifocality is a

powerful tool which nonetheless needs to be carefully managed in order to favour social mixing and break down barriers.

Players/spectators overlapping

The aforementioned issues about the spatial relationship and distance between players and spectators relate to the dynamics of distinction and separation which characterise the sportisation process (Bale, 1998).

According to Parlebas (1986), only those old games and pastimes whose founding rules lacked contradictions or ambiguities and made shifting loyalties unacceptable, thus stabilising the friend vs. enemy juxtaposition, could be codified and reshaped into sports. As irrational features, in fact, the fluidity and variability of line-ups that characterise many traditional games are incompatible with the concern for definition and delimitation typical of modern rationality (La Mendola, 1989). A steady composition of the playing teams is guaranteed by a clear definition of the boundaries between one side and another, as well as between players and spectators, unlike what happened in old games like the "hurlinge to the countrie" described by Elias and Dunning (1986, 186) where entire villages faced each other with people continuously joining and leaving the game. Not only was the number of players undefined (and potentially unbalanced) in this kind of game, but also the status and role of each inhabitant of the villages involved was unclear since anyone could switch from spectator to player and vice versa. The sportisation process has defined these roles by formalising the spatial segregation of spectators from players:

> In the early days of modern sports the fixed boundaries which now exist between spectators and players were absent. The explicit white line separating players from spectators was not introduced in soccer until it was recognised that spectators would walk onto the field of play and interfere with the game. Hence, although the spatial parameters were established in 1863, the insistence on a marked line did not occur until 1882.… Territoriality may therefore be seen as a way of solving the problem of spectator interference in sports. (Bale, 1998, 271)

The architecture of our contemporary all-seated stadia makes visible the extent to which such a process has developed over the years and has been emphasised by the

commercialisation of sport, gradually turning spectators into consumers and reducing their physical and emotional participation and involvement.

As opposed to the exclusive structure of modern sports, many alternative sports events or activities try to include diversity and favour social mixing by blurring the boundaries between players and spectators. Admission criteria for athletes and/or visitors inevitably create different access barriers, which for instance can be formal (rules for the registration of players or criteria for inviting teams), economic (registration fees for players and teams, tickets for visitors) and physical (fences, gates and check points surrounding the venues and the pitches). Different degrees of openness partly depend on the ways these barriers are managed. Some events require a detailed list of participants for each team, whilst others ask only for the number of players to be given or even just the name of the team. Equally, this variability clearly depends on the extent of structuration and sportisation of games and physical activities within the event, with sports-like events needing a stricter control (for instance on the age, gender or nationality of players) to prevent disputes over the fairness of the competition and the final result, and game/play-like events being less concerned with these characteristics of individual participants. The St. Pauli AntiRa and the Mondiali Antirazzisti are quite similar in this regard, with their age- and gender-mixed tournaments whose participants do not mind playing in randomly-drawn teams together with previously unknown people, as already mentioned. The two events differ, however, in that the Mondiali Antirazzisti accept teams on a first come, first served basis, whilst the St. Pauli AntiRa involves a network of like-minded groups of activists and teams are usually invited from within that network. Nonetheless, both events welcome visitors (rather than spectators) who often end up having the opportunity to join in the game despite not being initially registered to play. By contrast, a clearer separation between players and visitors/spectators characterises other events whose structure is more similar to mainstream sports despite their alternative/inclusive ethos, such as the aforementioned Balon Mundial or the televised Amsterdam World Cup.

The multifocal form of many of these events further contributes to a bluring of the distinction between players and spectators. On the crowded pitch of the Open Fun Football Schools, each child and trainer who is having fun in one of the 12 stations is not only a player but also a spectator of the surrounding dozens of people who are simultaneously enjoying many other games and activities in the remaining 11 stations. Similarly, participants at the Mondiali Antirazzisti, despite being primarily focused on

the specific game they are playing, can also see a rainbow of teams concurrently playing on the neighbouring mini-pitches, hear their players and supporters screaming and laughing, and listen to the music being played by DJs alongside the playing field or the loudspeaker announcing the next round-table. Although a similar festival flavour can be also generated around mega-sport events through ancillary activities (Chalip, 2006), professional athletes are unlikely to merge with the crowd and enjoy the festive atmosphere. By contrast, the non-competitive and recreational character of these alternative sports events enables the players to be distracted by the party – or, to put it in other words, prevents them from being too distracted from the party. Additionally, drop-in events where teams are not required to list their players allow each participant to feel free to join and leave the game whenever they want, thus constantly switching from being a protagonist to being a spectator of the same event (rather than pre-emptively tuning their attitude according to whether they are there to play or to watch).

The way physical activities are organised thus contributes to de-sportise them by enabling participants to be simultaneously players and spectators of different sub-events (happening simultaneously) and of the same event (being free to constantly wave into and out of it). As noted before, this enables a collective effervescence to spread more equally amongst the participants rather than being directed towards (and absorbed from) a small group of protagonists.

Discussion and conclusions

All these and many other adaptations and changes in the way physical activity is organised and displayed reshape bodily movement, bringing it back from its sportised or sportified form to a more playful configuration. However, the fact that such a trend is becoming visible, especially in the sport-for-development field, does not imply that its outputs and consequences are always positive. In fact, each of the aforementioned structural or formal transformations has its contradictions and paradoxes.

Interaction dynamics within mixed teams show both the potential and the limits of the contact theory (Allport, 1954). Getting people to play together within the liminal time and space of an alternative sports event does not mean they will keep interacting on a longer-term basis, since the ice-breaking momentum needs to be supported through appropriate strategies for sustainability (Schulenkorf & Adair, 2013). Moreover, bringing different people together does not mean that they will necessarily like each other, or that they will interact on an equal basis. Gendered and generational interaction

in self-ruled play and games often tends to be regulated by the law of the strongest, favouring males over females (Skille & Waddington, 2006) and, up to a certain age, older participants over younger ones (Sterchele, 2011).

Therefore, whilst often sports boundaries and categories entail separation and exclusion, in many cases they can also be perceived as providing a sense of protection for the less powerful groups. Several studies have highlighted the importance of mono-ethnic sports teams in temporarily relieving the members of minorities from the strain and alienation habitually experienced in their everyday asymmetrical interactions within the hosting country (Krouwel, Boonstra, Duyvendak & Veldboer, 2006). These studies have also challenged the simplistic idea that separate sports activities only reinforce bonding social capital, whereas mixed activity generates bridging social capital (Elling et al., 2001; Janssens & Verweel, 2014; Spaaij, 2012; Theeboom, Schaillée & Nols, 2012). Likewise, segregated athletic environments such as Muslim women-only sports experiences (Ahmad, 2011), adapted physical activities for people with disabilities (Ninot, Bilard & Delignières, 2005) or gay and lesbian sports clubs (Elling, De Knop & Knoppers, 2003; Watson, Tucker, L. & Drury, 2013) can provide safe spaces (Spaaij & Schulenkorf, 2014) for various groups to escape religious, sexist, homophobic and other forms of discrimination. At the same time, these practices can also become spaces for social resistance and sub-cultural celebration (Green & Chalip, 1998).

A further downside of alternative (de-sportised) sports events such as those analysed in this paper is the risk that the unbalanced abilities between or within mixed (de-categorised) teams, alongside an excessively downplayed competitiveness, can reduce the excitement of participants and thus the appeal of the initiative (Green, 1997). Besides providing enthusiasm and enjoyment, the striving for a goal and the desire for achievement nurtured by the competitive dimension of sports activities can also play an important role in motivating individuals and groups to recover from different conditions of social isolation re-awakening active and positive attitudes (Carless, Peacock, McKenna & Cooke, 2013; Richards, 1997; Sherry, 2010).

However, as anticipated in the introduction, the aim of this paper has not necessarily been to praise the merits of alternative sports events and activities over mainstream and standard ones, but rather to develop an exploratory analysis of the de-sportising trend that is becoming significant in the sport-for-development field. Besides providing insights that might help practitioners systematize their knowledge and reflexivity regarding their practice (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011), the analysis also

stimulates scholarly reflection by raising further critical questions for future research. The comparison between sportised and de-sportised physical activities might help detect further hegemonic and neo-imperialistic dynamics in the sport-for-development field, revealing the cultural attitudes of the so-called developed countries by which most initiatives are conceived and implemented. For example, it might be investigated whether programmes based on de-sportised physical activities are more common in the so-called First World (deemed civilised enough to afford the luxury of de-structured practices) whilst more traditional and mainstream sportised practices tend to be used to intervene in the so-called Third and Fourth World (deemed to be in need of being civilised through rationalised forms of bodily interaction).

The fact that sport needs to be de-sportised in order to foster sociability and inclusion tells us about the limits of this specific configuration and cultural form of bodily practice and social relations in breaking down barriers and addressing social issues. Starting to doubt the real potential of sport in itself for such purposes, we should speak about games or play for development, rather than sport. Nonetheless, the term sport clearly functions as a broad communicative symbol that makes a sport-labelled initiative more attractive than a play- or games-labelled event, since it recalls a standardised form whose meaning can be taken for granted. Far from being simply a linguistic matter, this is a relevant social-scientific issue that unveils the representations and expectations of the participants and their cultural background and ultimately impacts on the event's success. The disappointment of some participants in de-sportised physical activities yet still labelled as sport events – such as Football for Peace, Antiracist World Cup and the like – evidently suggests which idea of sport underpins their expectations. Hence, the sportised form of physical activity still displays a powerful appeal that clearly needs to be acknowledged and accounted for.

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